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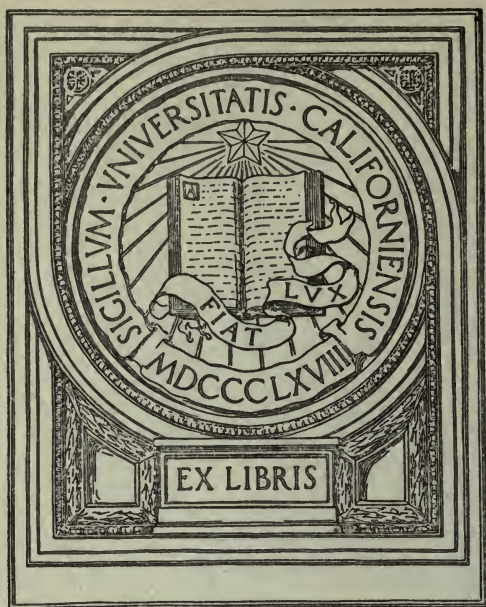


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CHAUNCEY WETMORE WELLS

1872-1933



This book belonged to Chauncey Wetmore Wells. He taught in Yale College, of which he was a graduate, from 1897 to 1901, and from 1901 to 1933 at this University.

Chauncey Wells was, essentially, a scholar. The range of his reading was wide, the breadth of his literary sympathy as uncommon as the breadth of his human sympathy. He was less concerned with the collection of facts than with meditation upon their significance. His distinctive power lay in his ability to give to his students a subtle perception of the inner implications of form, of manners, of taste, of the really disciplined and discriminating mind. And this perception appeared not only in his thinking and teaching but also in all his relations with books and with men.

THE FACE AND THE CROSS

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Chauncey Wetmore Wells
with the Preacher's love.

THE FACE AND THE CROSS

*A Baccalaureate Sermon preached
at Delaware College Newark*

Delaware June 16 1901

also at Christ Church

Waltham

Massachusetts

November 10 1901 by the

Reverend Hubert Wetmore Wells

Rector of Saint Andrew's

Church Wilmington

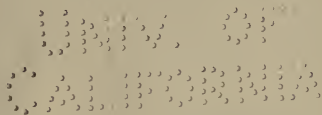
Delaware

“He is the bright, particular, un-
qualified success in the annals of
the Spirit.” [p. 12]

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IN MEMORIAM
C. W. Wells

TO THE
MEMBERS OF THE
WALTHAM SOCIETY

“THEY SAT AND WATCHED HIM THERE.” ST. MATTHEW XXVII. 36.

THE place is Golgotha, the watchers are the “soldiers of the Governor,” and Him they watch is Jesus of Nazareth. Near by, one on either side of Jesus’ cross, are other two condemned and crucified : these are not watched. It is not the crosses lifted from the hill; it is not the fear “lest His disciples should come and steal Him away;” it is not the gravity of His crime; it is not the assembled and accusing multitude; it is not the presence of Jewish dignitaries, that moves this little guard of Pilate’s soldiery to look at the Central Figure in this group of three rather than at the rest. By the hard custom of their business the executioners were indifferent to all this. Decisions of courts, and the wild people’s tumult, and flocking curiosity were to them as the idle wind, and by them unrespected. What, then, beckoned them out of their accustomed indifference and fixed their eyes on Him? I think it was His face. Have you ever studied faces? Unconsciously every man studies faces. Not at his hands and feet,

but into his face we look when we put the man a question or make the man an answer. The motion is instinctive, and we all use it. But we do not all reflect upon the habit and the instinct and follow it on to its revealing conclusions. A face is a marvelous thing. From it a man's soul looks out into life. There are long hours, and days together, when the tenant will not venture to the window. He is ashamed, or afraid, or morbid, or too much given to think upon himself, and so he comes not to the window. Something of the man may be guessed from his absence there. And when he comes he does not come ingenuously always, and under his smiles some dark particular motive lies concealed. But there are moments, and they most frequent, when the unguarded spirit shows itself, and in the man's face you may see the man. Purity, integrity, sobriety, chivalry creep into the face and change and hallow all the features. Lust and dishonor and laxity and selfishness cannot be kept forever out of it; and it is safe to say that the absence of the things we long to see there is the sure sign of a battle unattempted or of a battle lost: the man has never mastered the great vir-

tues to make them his, or he has welcomed the great vices and they have made him theirs. A face is a marvelous thing.

Marvelous, then, must have been the face of Jesus. For the characteristic of Jesus is that He reveals. His spirit never leaves the window, but suns itself there all the day. He has nothing to conceal. He has so vastly much to declare. We do not appreciate how very large a part the face of Jesus plays in that delineation of His character which we find in the Gospels. The author of the second Gospel, with his wonderful eyes, is never tired of telling us what he sees in Jesus' face. In it His great soul lived. His anger, His compassion, His serenity, His high-souled resolution all were visible to the disciple that watched His every motion and heard His every word. Chapter after chapter in that second Gospel might appropriately be named "A study of the face of Christ." The tradition of that face is preserved in Saint Paul's phrase forever. Men looked into that face and saw "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God:" the vision of God's glory—there it shone "in the face of Jesus Christ." And as those

soldiers sat and watched **Him** there, it was **His** face they watched — the face that made a glory above **His** limp and broken figure.

Let us sit with them there to-night and watch **Him** for a season. What shall we see? A face upon a cross. If we look from the face to the wooden thing on which it hangs, we shall see darkness only; if we look from the cross to the face, we shall see light alone. There in the two objects that the eyes observe is the picture of a conflict between two views of life, and the symbols of two opinions as to the issue of that conflict. The cross is the symbol of the existing order. The face is the symbol of the order of God. Pilate and the Jews, who represented then the existing order, thought that they had done with Jesus because they crucified **Him**. They held the common superstition touching death, that dead things have an end. And so over the dying Christ they wrote that **He** had tried and failed: "Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews." For the order of God Jesus stood alone. Death could not cloud **His** vision. In God's economy death had for **Him** its place, but death did not deceive **Him**. **He** saw in death the low begin-

nings of a larger life. Death, for the existing order, was the last resort. For Jesus death was just the way of life ; and from the face of Jesus on His cross shone down the glory born of an assurance, deep as soul, that He had won.

Which of the two is right, Pilate or Christ, the cross or Jesus' face ? As we ask this question comes the reflection that we have been born into the existing order, that we think very largely as it has taught us to think, that we aim for the things which it sets on high, and that we cannot altogether escape aiming for them. Our real ideals, beliefs, and opinions are patent in conduct and to conduct we must go to discover them. Vaporings about Jesus' success come to nothing. The hymns we sing and the prayers we pray and the phrases we adopt on Sunday morning are not the declaration most searching and desirable as to what we really think of the conflict between the existing order and Jesus. Go Monday morning to the banker, the merchant, the mechanic, the laborer, and let the man's work answer for the man. Theological opinion turned into theological phrase matters much or matters little : that depends. But

vital opinion declared by living matters a great deal, and the vital opinion of the existing order says, as of old it said, that Jesus was and is a failure: the dark, stern cross has conquered the sweet face.

When we meet the assertion, relieved of religious bias, there is a large measure of truth in this contention. There are two ways in which a man may fail: he may fail because his aim — the thing he tries to hit — is judged to be other than it is; and he may fail because he actually misses the thing he really tries to do. The great majority of Jesus' countrymen misjudged His aim. He never succeeded in freeing their minds from the thought that he should be their king. His reluctance was endured for a season, but there came a time when their chafing impatience broke the bonds of reverent restraint, and they determined to force the kingdom upon Him. He had waited for a propitious moment possibly, for a strong, indubitable backing. They knew their strength far better than did He. Now was the time. So they sought to take Him by force and make Him a king. Jesus withdrew, but His withdrawal did

not convince them. Perhaps they had been a little hasty: they could wait. But by and by, thought they, the hour would strike and their king would come to his own. If anything in the Gospels is clear, it is this misconception. Nor did it stop with the tumultuous people: the disciples were fully persuaded of it. They walked habitual witnesses to the exercise of the extraordinary power that Jesus surely possessed. Such power was both a sign and a guarantee — sign of his kingly origin and office and destiny; guarantee of a throne's possession. The cautioning word "See thou tell no man" was vainly uttered. The knit brow and lifted finger made their stern charge in vain. The Twelve clung to their delusion to the last. After the experience on the Mount, after the prophecy of suffering imminent, after the personal seclusion and confidence of the last northern journey, came the mother of James and John asking for them political favors: "Command that these my two sons may sit, one on Thy right hand, and one on Thy left hand, in Thy kingdom." The only quarrel recorded of the Twelve is most significant in the light it throws upon their thought of Jesus. It

happened, as did Salome's request for her sons' preferment, after the explicit foretelling of personal disaster, and as they journeyed towards Jerusalem. What was it all about? Who was to have the highest position in the new government! The miserable fiasco which we call the "triumphal entry" must have been a rude shock to this state of mind, but it could not dislodge the expectation. "Lord," ask they, "wilt Thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" About the fact there is for them no doubt. Only the manner of it and the hour is doubtful.

The story and the character of Judas are many-sided. One side concerns us in the present connection. This shrewd bargainer from Kerioth was an office-seeker. He had watched his Master let slip so many golden opportunities. Then came the great procession into Jerusalem, and to the crowd awaiting the fatal word only a long, compassionate look, and then withdrawal. I believe that that experience convinced Judas of his mistake and that what followed was the logical result of the broken hopes of the office-seeker. But it all goes to show how persistent was the misconception of

the Twelve, and just what they expected of Him. With a "kingdom not of this world" the traitor had no concern. His betrayal is at once a tribute to his perspicacity and a revelation of the motive of his discipleship. In his opinion Jesus was a failure, and in this opinion they all shared when they forsook Him and fled.

Over against many a name in the long roll of history has the generation in which it lived and worked written an adverse judgment, because the high soul had seen the heavenly vision and dared not disobey. Does it matter? Yes. Mistaken opinions are seldom free from a moral taint, and nobler men would have given Jesus a nobler judgment than His disciples uttered when they fled and left Him to His enemies. The ideal which Jesus aimed at was an ideal distinctly spiritual. His aim was to love God perfectly, to trust God entirely, to annihilate His own will by substituting for it the will of God; to love men perfectly, to make the bond between them LOVE that expresses itself in SERVICE. So far as He was judged of men He failed, as we have seen. Did He fail in some deeper, truer sense? The question has a double

answer. In Jesus' relation to God He succeeded. God was "with him." Nowhere in history is there a life whose deep opinions and convictions got so perfect an embodiment in conduct. Jesus loved God perfectly, trusted Him entirely, put God's will in the place of His own. Across this aspect of His life there falls no shadow. He is the bright, particular, unqualified success in the annals of the spirit. Faith is His great word, and faith is His great attainment. It sharply contrasts Jesus and all men whatsoever. Jesus was not given to wondering, but it is written that He " marvelled because of their unbelief." " How is it that ye have no faith ?" He asks of His trembling disciples. In Jesus' discipline of His own life He did not fail.

But what of His attempt to make of love the bond between men — love that expresses itself in service ? Jesus died some nineteen hundred years ago. He left behind Him a little band of disappointed office-seekers. With His death vanished all their hope of political preferment. But for all their disappointment and in spite of their failure to understand the aims of their Master, they had

for Him a saving personal attachment. In some measure they had caught His spirit, and when He came to them after His resurrection and sent them forth instructed in the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, they had made His way their way — the way of love that expresses itself in service. Over a large part of the earth their teaching has gone. Into the common instruction of youth in many a land it has entered as staple to that instruction. In immeasurable quantity, so subtly fused is it with other things, so concealed is it under various forms, that teaching has spread through the wide fabric of our Western life. Our debt to it is incalculable but immense. It is the fashion of leaven to work slowly, but it works, and we shall not say that it has failed because we find so much of the lump unleavened still. You go and look at the awful absorption of great administrative abilities in the personal concerns of their own particular business; or you note the perversion of positions of great trust into the selfish scheming of self-seeking men; or you observe the horrible indifference of corporate interests to public honor and the public good; or you

stand aghast at the maddening lust for gold, and the anarchy that inspires the wild scramble after it; and it seems to you as if the world had gone over to the side of those who come not to minister but to be ministered unto. You are tempted to believe that the spirit of Jesus, persuading men to love one another and to serve one another, has been overwhelmed like a voice crying in the breaking, rushing surf. In a weak moment you are tempted to think of self and to succeed for self. "Success" is the cry of the existing order. A successful governor, a successful lawyer, a successful engineer, a successful merchant — there is the common ambition of the common man. And service is not always the way of this success. Dishonor, and a hushed conscience, and sharp practice, and a turn of chance has brought success in the world's way to thousands, and the temptation is to take the easy road to success wherever that road may lie. You are tempted to take it with the rest. And the answer to your mood is Jesus' answer. He never used the word "success" nor any word akin to it. He never thought the thing "success." He never looked

to see what others had done, or what others possessed, to compare Himself with them. He did not seek the good opinion of men, for He knew that opinions change for trifling cause, and that a soul cannot intrust its happiness to men's good opinion. He had no fear of failure nor to be pointed at as one that failed. He knew, indeed, that He must fail if human life should ever gain its freedom and man's place rest secure below the reach of changes and chances. His death was the sublimation of failure, and its sanctification; and since He died and rose again, failure is the inalienable right and the not infrequent duty of noble souls. For the man Christ Jesus stands for the Race, and what is legitimate in His experience is legitimate in your experience, and what is possible for Him is possible for you. Over and over again in the long human story has the inalienable right of failure had its vindication, because always there is something that cannot be had unless one dares to fail — something as deep as life, and as real as the soul, and as eternal as God Himself. You can see it at Thermopylæ, immortal in its glorious possession

of three hundred simple souls that dared to fail and knew inevitably that fail they must. You can see it in the Athenian prison where Socrates the aged drained the poisoned cup and smiled at death, and failed for love of the still small voice that called him ever to the divine obedience. You can see it best of all on Calvary.

The spots on God's earth that have the largest power of inspiration are not the fields of battles "grandly won," but the scenes of noble failures: a narrow stretch of Grecian beach, a cabined prison room in Athens, a little unmarked mound without the city's wall. Into such soil life's noblest inspirations strike their roots. The secret of it is not hard to find. The failure of the man who nobly fails is not his failure but another's. The failure of Leonidas is Xerxes' failure and the crash of all that Xerxes stands for. The failure of Socrates is the failure of his judges and his enemies and the illiberal, shallow spirit that in them lived. The failure of Jesus is not His, but the failure of the men of His nation and His time — of Judas and Peter and Annas and Pilate and the rest. Somehow in God's economy

it is written that the *ignoble failures* shall come to light by the revealing experience of *heroic failures*. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the earth and die it abideth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit." What the world needs to-day is the old need, the spirit that would serve rather than the spirit that would succeed; the spirit that aims at something far beyond the opinions and oppositions of men; the spirit that is free enough to fail that life may be holier and the sweeter made; the spirit that shone down from the face of Jesus — the deathless hope of it, the glorious victory of it — over the dark cross until it touched the hard faces of those four executioners as "they sat and watched Him there."

Beloved of Christ Church, — beloved still, howe'er the years may pass, loved with a love that time is powerless to dim or change,¹ it would be unfortunate indeed if the word so often uttered here to-night should sink unqualified into your thoughts, unqualified of Christ.

¹ Instead of these words of address at Christ Church, were the words, Gentlemen of the Graduating Class, in the Baccalaureate Sermon.

It is Christ's failure that I bid you watch, it is Christ's failure that I bid you dare, it is the ennobling and enriching of life through failure such as His that I urge you to consider. Love God as Jesus loved God; trust in God as did Jesus; surrender your will to God's will as Jesus surrendered His, and so far succeed in the noble mastery of self. But in every relation of life among men, seek to make of love the bond — love that expresses itself in service. If honor and power and wealth and high consideration are yours, see that they are the incidents of a career of usefulness. If obscurity and poverty and the common lot are yours, remember that these, too, are incidents in a life inspired — incidents and accidents not mattering over much, and never to be weighed against a love that expresses itself in service. Bring to your home and town and land the new and redeeming devotion for which they wait and yearn and suffer, and so help to fill the whole earth with the knowledge of God "as the waters cover the sea." And if at times the struggle seems too hard, and the end remote, and the task thankless, and the

worth of it doubtful, go look into the face of Christ, and the yoke will be easy and the burden light. Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for the perfect love of Thy blessed Son ; for His perfect trust in Thee ; for His utter surrender of his His will to Thine. But chiefly are we bound to thank Thee for His failure, too, in order that something nobler than success may live and thrive and bloom forever in the seamèd walls of our so rugged life. Keep us, we beseech Thee, from the awful heresy of "success," and teach us day by day the beauty and the power of service. Not a few of those assembled here are girding sword to thigh for life's long battle. By the hallowing power of their entire devotion make the places in which they stand to fight glorious and holy with love's sacrifice, whether to the shallow minds of men they lose or win the battle. May they nobly vindicate their right to fail for the success of lofty issues. Lift their eyes above the darkness and the cross, until in Jesus' face they see the light and power and destiny that well becomes a Son of God, Whose sons they are. For Christ's sweet sake we ask it. Amen.

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